



Discurso di Minister President
mr. Henny Eman na Rotary Club
como invitado especial.

Aruba, 22 juni 1987

Ladies and gentlemen:

For me it is an honor to have been asked to be here with you, this evening.

I especially welcome this opportunity to speak with you, for I feel that our continues dialogue is crucial to a smooth cooperation between the Aruban government and the business and professional community on our island. I hope these meetings will continue on a frequent basis.

Not only do I welcome this opportunity to inform you on the state of our island and the course for economic recovery that we have set, but tonight my quest is also to build a stronger bond that will create an alliance between all sectors of our community and our government as partners towards progress so that Aruba can be a strong country for the next generation of our children.

To understand the state of our island today, we must remember our recent past. The situation at the beginning of the last year, when our government entered office was truly horrendous.

We came into office tempered by our experiences of 1985. For countless hours before we entered government I had listened to young workers out of work, to students without the scholarship for university, and to families without the chance to own a home. I had seen to many - far too many - idle men and women desperate to work. I had seen to many - far too many - working families desperate to protect the value of their wages.

As we entered government our worst nightmares were Aruba's realities. The economic situation was worse than we thought possible. Over 5000 people had left

our shores, and of our remaining labor force close to 6000 men and women were out of work.

Construction projects on the island were being halted. Stores throughout Aruba were closing. Investors, both locally and internationally turned their backs on our island. Even men and women who had jobs were so discouraged with the island's economic conditions, that they petitioned for work out of the country. Pessimism could be found in all neighborhoods.

The crisis was effecting our children because our predecessors closed elementary schools, combined classes, cut learning materials, reduced the number of college scholarships and made the national library contingent on one's ability to pay and not one's ability to learn.

When a crisis reaches such a magnitude that it cuts the future out from under our children and thus cuts the future out from under our entire nation, new directions, new techniques and new leaders must be summoned to the challenge.

Our challenge was to stop the defeatism that was being heard. Some said that our economic problems were uncontrollable - that we had to learn to live with the seemingly endless cycle of unemployment and high prices.

There were also pessimistic predictions that Status Aparte would never work, that the introduction of the Aruban currency would fail.

Well, those predictions were wrong.

The record is clear, and I believe that history will remember this as an era of Aruban renewal, remember this government as a government of change and remember the Aruban people of this generation as people of destiny.

But for those of us who stayed and welcomed the challenge of building a New Aruba, the obstacles have been great.

We had to change the pessimistic atmosphere that was plaguing our island.

We had to face and find a solution for the largest unemployment problem, Aruba had ever known, and set a new course for Economic Development.

We had to stop deterioration of our Educational System and again give back to education, the priority it deserves.

As we entered office 18 months ago, we knew that the change in the country's atmosphere would be the first major step, toward preparing the New Aruba. And together we have done that.

Instead of depicting the situation as we had found it, we started to illustrate what we were going to make of it.

We set goals and we started working on them and started convincing those who had to be convinced.

Many felt and maybe many of you in here said that we were too optimistic, and yes we were.

But I say, if we had drawn the picture as we had found it, if we transmitted our fear of the reality as we had found it, today we would not have created this atmosphere of confidence that has allowed us to progress, and make some things that seemed impossible, possible, such as the introduction of our florin.

Today we might not have gotten people, both in Aruba and throughout the world convinced that investment in Aruba is worthwhile.

It was critical to change the atmosphere and show that people once again believed in Aruba.

Together we worked toward this goal and together we instilled a basis of confidence that opened the way to a number of possibilities in the field of economic development, and the creation of immediate needed jobs.

Aware of our tremendous tourist potential and our need for immediate job creation, we set out to double up our room capacity in the upcoming years. When we took office a year and a half ago, construction on the island was almost at a stand still with basically one large project under construction, " The Golden Tulip ".

Throughout 1986 and in the beginning of 87' we have been working on several large scale projects that have either begun or will begin construction soon.

The figures are starting to move. The number of rooms is up and unemployment is slowly going down.

I know that statistics and details of the economy may sometimes seem dry, but the economy and economic statistics are really a story of all of us as a country, and these statistics tell wether we are going forward or standing still or going backward. They tell wether an unployed man can get a job or whether a man who has a job can get an increase in salary or own a home or wether he can retire in security or send his children to college. These are the people and the things behind the statistics.

On the first of January 1986, we had 2041 rooms. Today we have 2718, 677 new rooms. Under construction, we have 116 at the Playa Linda, 60 at Bucuti Beach Hotel, 32 at the Tamarijn, 70 at the Dutch Village,

84 at the Caribbean Palm Village, 24 at La Quinta Beach Resort: this means 286 new rooms are being built at this very moment. The government has played a very active role in almost all of these projects.

Another 1315 rooms is being projected to begin construction in a few months: the financing of the expansion of the Holiday Inn with its 200 rooms is ready , the expansion of 200 rooms at the Americana, 6 months after August, is obligatory as stipulated in the sales contracts, the Hyatt's 340 rooms are being financed by a Japanese Company, the 200 rooms at the Swain Wharf are being guaranteed by the NCM, now that Hyatt received Japanese financing, the 300 rooms of Meta Corporation will begin construction in August and the 76 of Casa del Mar will begin this month. Besides these, many other projects are working on financing or are in the " final stage ". This will mean 2700 new jobs in construction and later 2700 in the exploitation of the new rooms.

In conjunction with expansion and renovation in the hotel industry on the island, the Aruba Palm Beach Hotel and the Americana were recently sold, in accordance with the governmental program.

With the government working on its short term goal of expanding tourism, we have appointed a wellknown marketing company to assist in determining a policy for the expansion of existing tourist markets and the possibility of opening new markets.

This policy is now being implemented to undertake tourism management in a more professional manner.

With the closing of the Lago Oil Refinery in March of 1985 San Nicolas has suffered tremendously. With San Nicolas being a top priority a local group, named CODESAN, was formed with some of the most active people in the San Nicolas area.

While this commission and others are looking for continued ways to invigorate San Nicolas, the government has put a lot of efforts to reopen the Lago Oil Refinery by examining all possibilities. There is a general agreement with EXXON to develop the Seroe Colorado Area into a resort complex. Negotiation started today.

To truly reach Aruba's potential as a country, the government realizes that depending on only one sector of the country's economy, especially after the experience of Lago, is not wise. With this factor in mind, the government is working extensively to diversify our economy introducing, service of telecommunication, Financial Centrum and industrial development to Aruba, with the cooperation of professional consultants.

This development centers around using the opportunities of the United States Caribbean Basin Initiative program as well as the markets of the European Economic Community. A major problem in developing new industrial activities in Aruba is the lack of possibilities acquiring the financing needed to begin new projects both locally as well as from abroad.

Before the new government took over, the island did not have a well run development bank with the financial backing, to facilitate the acquisition of the needed capital for small and medium size projects.

In efforts to try to fill this gap, we have convinced EXXON and Holland to participate in a investment bank for Aruba. This will enable those who wish to begin new commercial activities in Aruba to acquire financing in an easier manner. With this new bank the government will take away one of the major obstacles for those who want to begin projects.

Giving Education back the priority and attention it deserves, it was clear that we had to quickly change the measures that had been introduced in the past and that were badly hurting our Educational System.

Together we worked - to bring class sizes back to responsible proportion - made teachers available to those students who were having problems in the 1st and 2nd grades; - split the classes that were combined and made them separate once again; principles were instructed to dedicate 16 hours a week keeping contact with parents and students to guarantee a smooth educational operation; installed a working group to develop a 4 year plan to establish education as a top priority of the new government; - lowered the library fees from f. 25,- to f. 5,- which brought a drastic increase in the borrowing of library books; - increase in the number of university students studying abroad by 400%, by giving over 200 students the ability to study in 1986 as opposed to 40 in 1985.

Educated young men and women are our most precious asset. They are the key to economic and social progress, and I think that the introduction of our new scholarship program, which gives every child that leaves High School today, an opportunity to study further, is the most important action that we could have taken to secure a future for our island.

Every consumer and business man in Aruba knows that he can safely spend today and invest tomorrow with real confidence again in the long range future of Aruba. Nevertheless, of course, we cannot be complacent. I am satisfied with a good deal of the progress that has been made, but I don't think it is sufficient, and I am sure you don't either.

In 1987 and in the next few years our mission is clear and our path is straight for we must continue to put people back to work and unite our families. I feel together, the Arubian people can accomplish anything- Together we must continue on the solid path that we have created.

I call on you louder and stronger than ever before because of all of your support can make a difference.

Beyond developping the essential government's policies and programs designed to meet our problems we must be convinced that our future cannot depend on the government alone.

The government can lead. It can be the catalyst for our society.

But the ultimate solutions lie in the attitudes and actions of our people.

I realize that we shall not reach these goals overnight, nor shall we achieve them without inconvenience, some disagreement, and some adjustments on every side- among labor, business and the government.

But like it is said " There is a time for every purpose under the heaven. A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together.

And ladies and gentlemen, I believe it is time for us to gather stones together to build this country as it must be built in the coming years.